

The FEATURES



Alidad searching for antiques in
Guinevere on the Kings Road
Facing page: In the dramatic dining
room, meals can be enjoyed amidst
candlelight. Alidad designed the
dining chairs and custom hand-
painted stamped leather walls,
echoing a 19th-century English
dining service

at home with ALIDAD

Iranian-British interior designer Alidad opens up his Mayfair townhouse to Bazaar Interiors

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Photography by MARYAM EISLER*



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Alidad's East-facing sitting room includes a custom sofa in Pierre Frey fabric, Victorian side chair in Colony fabric, 17th-century Flemish tapestry, and Aubusson rug



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he clock has nearly just struck 10 o'clock in the morning and all is calm and in order at the home of Alidad. Four guests have arrived to his impressive classically designed and opulently decorated abode, tucked away on a charming Mayfair street. His guests are dressed impeccably, grand dames and *messieurs* of high British society, lovers of culture, good food, art and design. They have never met each other before. Nor have they met Alidad. And just like that, right on time, the Persian-British designer commences one of his acclaimed sessions: At Home with Alidad. Each guest takes their seat in the designer's living room, light rushing in from off the street, illuminating his classical interiors filled with plush fabrics and works of art, and opens the impeccably produced hand-bound menu of the day to come. Alidad guides them through each and every part of the rich interiors that comprises his home, speaking about the art as much as the design and fabric of each space. The multi-hour experience culminates in an exquisitely cooked meal served in his dining room where the heart and soul of haute cuisine meets the profound aesthetics of good taste; Alidad's world offers contemporary lessons in epicureanism.

The Iranian-British designer's lavish style stems from his childhood growing up in the ancient lands of Persia. It was there that he developed a deep appreciation of history, one that enables him to incorporate inspiration from the Baroque to the Neo-Classical, Art Deco to Chinoiserie. After schooling in Switzerland and a degree in mathematics, statistics and computer sciences from London University, Alidad established his design studio after working for Sotheby's where he was the youngest departmental director for Islamic works of art and textiles. "Yet I soon learned that my real love was found in styling the spaces rather than in the objects that resided in them," he remembers. At Sotheby's he became a master in colour combinations, antique textiles and furniture arrangements – all skills he transferred to his London home. Friends he entertained soon sought his advice on colour choice and furnishings until it became clear to him that he was an interior decorator. In 1985 he launched Alidad Ltd, and has worked ever since on interior design projects in the UK, Europe and the Middle East.

Alidad, with his gentle nature, classic dressing and impeccable manners, is a muse himself and merges effortlessly with his design. His Mayfair townhouse is a trip back in time, where rich Persian references marry classical lines and British details. "My philosophy is to produce timeless interiors: interiors which are okay today and next week, okay in a few years and 20 years' time," says Alidad. "They're not subject to fashion, even though sometimes certain things in fashion may influence me, I am there to create a home for a particular client which is like a glove that fits one's hand and will continue to fit for the next 20 or 30 years." The decorator looks at a space as a place that has evolved over many generations. "Different generations of that family have added their input even though the whole thing has been created recently. The whole idea in my head is that it hasn't just been done, it hasn't just been finished, but has evolved over the years and someone perhaps has come in recently and put it together rather than started it from scratch."

Such an understanding of the layers of a particular space stems from his childhood travels. Each September, he and his brother, mother, and father would holiday in Europe,



Passionate about fabrics, Alidad is seen here in the Alidad Ltd. office with a few of his favourites

Facing page: The cosy space features a custom sofa in Colony fabric with a Turnell & Gigon fringe, a Victorian slipper chair, and walls hand-painted by Alex Davison

spending ample time in cities such as Vienna, London and Florence where Alidad gained a rich appreciation of history. In Tehran, he and his brother were brought up in a house with a large garden and views of the mountains north of Tehran – a home where he was surrounded by nature and Persia's endless history. "My rooms are evolved as though they had developed over generations, each one contributing its own layer of individuality and history," he says. "I don't believe in fashion which is often transitory, I prefer a sense of timeless elegance and matured nonchalance. Life is so hectic and stressful that a home is a vital haven in which to relax and forget the outside world. I like to think that I help clients create something very special to them, which will lift their spirits every time they step through the door."

The sixth sense is therefore of utmost importance to Alidad's design process. He creates based on instinct; the immediate feelings he has towards a place and how he envisions a "sense of balance" among the interiors. He has a vision for his surroundings followed by energy and ideas. "In order to do that I think one of the things I do, I'm lucky because I'm quite intuitive, is feel and pick up things about people quite easily because when I'm doing a house for somebody I don't want it to look as if it's just another house I've done, it's a house for those particular clients; meeting their needs and their character, the way that they live and their style of life," he explains. "Within a relatively short period of time I sort of know whether this is going to work or not and quite a few clients also know if it's going to work or not and somehow, within a few weeks, the trust starts building and I start working properly when we have that in place. I think because peo-

ple realise that I've got the best intention in my head and I really do want to produce something which is 'them', they start to relax and we all become more comfortable and that's the time we start working towards a beautiful home." Vision can come from an old piece of fabric, an artwork, a detail from a photograph that evokes memories or from something historical that Alidad remembers from years prior. Everything lies first in the details and then is built up slowly into a space of order, balance and harmony.

Alidad's intricate design process is lavishly

dad started from that: being able to share my ideas with other people and talk about it." I take a sip of my oriental tea and bite down on a date as Alidad proceeds to explain his inspiration for the project – one that gathers together perfect strangers to learn the pillars of good design. "I wanted to do it in a very spontaneous and unstructured way so when we have an At Home with Alidad day it's not really ordered, it depends on who's there, what they want me to talk about. They can direct the conversation and, of course if they don't, I will go on talking but I've never done two At Home with Alidad days that have been the same. Every time is different. Rather like my interiors that are done around a particular person or a couple, this is really done around who is sitting in that room, who they are and what they want to talk about."

Magic envelops his guests after a few minutes. They listen attentively and watch his every move as he gracefully whisk them from this room to the next, offering them the best teas and cuisine so as to whet their palette for the vision of beauty he shows them. "And I must say I love it," he beams. "I love sharing ideas. There's no better place than doing it at home where we can see everything, and feel it and touch it. Rather than abstract ideas, which I might talk about on the phone or at an event, you can experience and feel them when you come to my home." Elated at the end and parting with newfound knowledge, the guests kiss one another, exchange cards and leave inspired and with new friendships. "It gives me a lot of pleasure and it takes me away from this other life of mine which is very hectic and detail-orientated," says Alidad. "I am endlessly trying to control things from going wrong, and this is like a day of magic and I love it." ■

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explained at his At Home with Alidad experience – the session I have come to witness today. "Over the years I've had so many journalists who have asked me how I do my interiors and how I can mix so many colours, patterns, textures and antiques and all sorts of things that potentially might clash together," says Alidad. "So over the years I've worked out my process of design and the way things work and I've realised that I love sharing all these ideas and At Home with Ali-

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A table by Georges Mohasseb with vintage chairs. Above it is a lighting fixture by Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance. The artwork in the background is by Peter Zimmermann